

The Fundamental Problems of Writing History in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories and the City*

Suchetona Pal

Abstract

Orhan Pamuk's stimulating reading and writing of the magnificent past of his city Istanbul weaves a magical charm in his partly memoir and autobiographical *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. Although by conjuring the past of the city he functions as a historian, Pamuk also reminds us that his text is as much about his own destiny as much about the city. It is in the process of discovering the similarities between these two purposes as well as segregating one from the other, calling one personal, nostalgic and the other as impersonal and objective that we begin to question how far a historian is allowed to be imaginative and the imaginative writer to be a historian. It is because with the discipline of history that the claims of authenticity and legitimacy are bound together. At the heart of the text, Pamuk introduces us to the complex relation he shares with the city like any other citizen of Istanbul when it comes to discovering the rich texture of the city through the lens of history. In this course, we are also confronted with the very problem about the construction of the Turkish identity through the narrative of History. In this paper I have attempted to explore Pamuk's views about difficult role of a historian for this city, especially the one who strictly follows the 19th century parameters of the Western model of writing history. As Pamuk's ostentatious purpose comes out to be the narrator of the city's past, I have attempted to bring out the various confusions and contradictions to the role of a Western modern historian and his objective narrative of history which Pamuk raises and calls into question reminding us again and again about the uniqueness of his city.

Key words: Orhan Pamuk, writing of history, objectivity and universality, identity.